



*Joy*  
*unto*  
**death**

**friendship as a form of life**

## JOY UNTO DEATH

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*What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"*

*Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine."*

*If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?*

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

## **Materialism of Joy**

*Don't ask for the formula for opening up worlds to you in some syllable like a bent dry branch. Today, we can only tell you what we are not, what we don't want.*

*E. Montale*

### **Life cannot simply be something to cling to.**

This thought skims through everyone at least once. We have a possibility that makes us freer than the gods: we can quit. This is an idea to be savoured to the end. Nothing and no one is obliging us to live. Not even death. For that reason our life is a *tabula rasa*, a slate on which nothing has been written, so contains all the words possible. With such freedom, we cannot live as slaves. Slavery is for those who are condemned to live, those constrained to eternity, not for us. For us there is the unknown—the unknown of spheres to be ventured into, unexplored thoughts, guarantees that explode, strangers to whom to offer a gift of life. The unknown of a world where one might finally be able to give away one's excess self love. Risk too. The risk of brutality and fear. The risk of finally staring *mal de vivre* in the face. All this is encountered by anyone who decides to put an end to the job of existing.

### **Our contemporaries seem to live by jobbing,**

desperately juggling with a thousand obligations including the saddest of all of them—enjoying themselves. They cover up the incapacity to determine their own lives with detailed frenetic activity, the speed that accompanies increasingly passive ways of behaving. They are unaware of the lightness of the negative.

**We can choose not to live.** That is the most beautiful reason for opening oneself up to life with joy. 'There is always time to put an end to things; one might as well rebel and play'—is how the materialism of joy talks.

**We can choose not to act,** and that is the most beautiful reason for acting. We bear within ourselves the potency of all the acts we are capable of, and no boss will ever be able to deprive us of the possibility of saying no. What we are and what we want begins with a no. From it is born the only reason for getting up in the morning. From it is born the only reason for going armed to the assault of an order that is suffocating us.

**On the one hand** there is the existent, with its habits and certainties. And of certainty, that social poison, one can die.

**On the other** hand there is insurrection, the unknown bursting into the life of all. The possible beginning of an exaggerated practice of freedom.

## The Practice of Joy before Death // Georges Bataille

*All this I am, and I want to be: at the same time dove,  
serpent, and pig.*

*Nietzsche*

**When one finds oneself situated** in such a way that the world is happily reflected in them, without entailing any destruction or suffering - as on a beautiful spring morning - they can let themselves be carried away by the resulting enchantment or simple joy. But he can also perceive, at the same time, the weight and the vain yearning for empty rest implied by this beatitude. At that moment, something cruelly rises up in him that is comparable to a bird of prey that tears open the throat of a smaller bird in an apparently peaceful and clear blue sky. He recognizes that he cannot fulfill his life without surrendering to an inexorable movement, whose violence he can feel acting on the most remote areas of his being with a rigor that frightens him. If he turns to other beings who do not go beyond beatitude, he experiences no hate, but, on the contrary, he sympathizes with necessary pleasures; he clashes only with those who pretend to attain fulfillment in their lives, who act out a risk-free charade in order to be recognized as having attained fulfillment, while in fact they only speak of fulfillment. But he should not succumb to vertigo. For vertigo swiftly exhausts and threatens to revive a concern for happy leisure or, if that cannot be attained, for a painless emptiness. Or if he does not give in, and if he tears himself completely apart in terrified haste, he enters death in such a way that nothing is more horrible.

**He alone is happy who,** having experienced vertigo to the point of trembling in his bones, to the point of

being incapable of measuring the extent of his fall, suddenly finds the unhoped-for strength to turn his agony into a joy capable of freezing and transfiguring those who meet it. But the only ambition that can take hold of a man who, in cold blood, sees his life fulfilled in rending agony, cannot aspire to a grandeur that only extreme chance has at its disposal. This kind of violent decision, which disrupts his repose, does not necessarily entail either his vertigo or his fall in sudden death. In him, this decision may become an act and a power by which he devotes himself to the rigor whose movement ceaselessly closes in on him, as cutting as the beak of a bird of prey. Contemplation is only the context, sometimes calm and sometimes stormy, in which the rapid force of his action must one day be put to the test. The mystical existence of the one whose "joy before death" has become inner violence can never attain the satisfying beatitude of the Christian who gives himself a foretaste of eternity. The mystic of "joy before death" can never be seen as cornered, for he is able to laugh complacently at every human endeavor and to know every accessible enthusiasm: but the totality of life-ecstatic contemplation and lucid knowledge accomplished in a single action that cannot fail to become risk-is however just as inexorably his lot as death is that of the condemned man. '

**The texts that follow** cannot alone constitute an initiation into the exercise of a mysticism of "joy before death. " While admitting that a method of initiation might exist, they do not represent even a part of it. Since oral initiation is itself difficult, it is impossible to give in a few pages more than the vaguest representation of that which by nature cannot be grasped. On the whole, these writings represent, moreover, less exercises strictly speaking



than simple descriptions of a contemplative state or of an ecstatic contemplation. These descriptions would not even be acceptable if they were not given for what they are, in other words, as free. Only the very first text could be proposed as an exercise.

**While it is appropriate to use the word mysticism** when speaking of "joy before death" and its practice, this implies no more than an affective resemblance between this practice and those of the religions of Asia or Europe. There is no reason to link any presuppositions concerning an alleged deeper reality with a Joy that has no object other than immediate life. "Joy before death" belongs only to the person for whom there is no beyond; it is the only intellectually honest route in the search for ecstasy.

**Besides,** how could a beyond, a God or what resembles God, still be acceptable? No words are clear enough to express the happy disdain of the one who dances with the time that kills him" for those who take refuge in the expectation of eternal beatitude. This kind of fretful saintliness-which first had to be sheltered from erotic excess-has now lost all its power: one can only laugh at a sacred drunkenness allied with a horror of debauchery. Prudery may be healthy for backward souls, but those who would be afraid of nude girls or whisky would have little to do with "joy before death."

**Only a shameless,** indecent saintliness can lead to a sufficiently happy loss of self. "Joy before death" means that life can be glorified from root to summit. It robs of meaning everything that is an intellectual or moral beyond, substance, God, immutable order, or salvation. It is an apotheosis of that which is perishable, apotheosis of flesh and alcohol as well

as of the trances of mysticism. The religious forms it rediscovers are the naive forms that antedate the intrusion of a servile morality: it renews the kind of tragic jubilation that man "is" as soon as he stops behaving like a cripple, glorifying necessary work and letting himself be emasculated by the fear of tomorrow.

## I

*I abandon myself to peace, to the point of annihilation.  
The noises of struggle are lost in death, as rivers are lost in  
the sea, as stars burst in the night. The strength of combat  
is fulfilled in the silence of all action. I enter into peace as  
I enter into a dark unknown. I fall in this dark unknown.  
I myself become this dark unknown.*

## II

*I AM joy before death.  
Joy before death carries me.  
Joy before death hurls me down.  
Joy before death annihilates me.*

*I remain in this annihilation and, from there, I picture  
nature as a play of forces expressed in multiplied and  
incessant agony. I slowly lose myself in unintelligible and  
bottomless space.*

*I reach the depths of worlds.  
I am devoured by death.  
I am devoured by fever.  
I am absorbed in somber space.  
I am annihilated in joy before death."*

### III

*I AM joy before death.*

*The depth of the sky, lost space is joy before death: everything is profoundly cracked. I imagine the earth turning vertiginously in the sky. I imagine the sky itself slipping, turning, and lost. The sun, comparable to alcohol, turning and bursting breathlessly. The depth of the sky like an orgy of frozen light, lost. Everything that exists destroying itself, consuming itself and dying, each instant producing itself only in the annihilation of the preceding one, and itself existing only as mortally wounded. Ceaselessly destroying and consuming myself in myself in a great festival of blood.*

*I imagine the frozen instant of my own death.*

### IV

*I focus on a point before me and I imagine this point as the geometric locus of all existence and all unity, of all separation and all dread, of all unsatisfied desire and all possible death. I adhere to this point and a profound love of what I find there burns me until I refuse to be alive for any reason other than for what is there, for this point which, being both the life and death of the loved one, has the blast of a cataract. And at the same time it is necessary to strip away all external representations from what is there, until it is nothing but a pure violence, an interiority, a pure inner fall into a limitless abyss; this point endlessly absorbing from the cataract all its inner*

nothingness, in other words, all that has disappeared, is 'past,' and in the same movement endlessly prostituting a sudden apparition to the love that vainly wants to grasp that which will cease to be. The impossibility of satisfaction in love is a guide toward the fulfilling leap at the same time that it is the nullification of all possible illusion.

## V

*If I imagine myself in a vision and in a halo that transfigures the ecstatic and exhausted face of a dying being, what radiates from that face illuminates with its necessity the clouds in the sky, whose grey glow then becomes more penetrating than the light of the sun itself. In this vision, death appears to be of the same nature as the illuminating light, to the extent that light is lost once it leaves its source: it appears that no less a loss than death is needed for the brilliance of life to traverse and transfigure dull existence, for it is only its free uprooting that becomes in me the strength of life and time. In this way I cease to be anything other than the mirror of death, just as the universe is only the mirror of light.*

## VI.

### Heraclitean Meditation

*I MYSELF AM WAR.*

*I imagine human movement and excitation, whose possibilities are limitless: this movement and excitation can only be appeased by war.*

*I imagine the gift of an infinite suffering, of blood and open bodies, in the image of an ejaculation cutting down the one it jolts and abandoning him to an exhaustion charged with nausea.*

*I imagine the earth projected in space, like a woman screaming, her head in flames. Before the terrestrial world whose summer and winter order the agony of all living things, before the universe composed of innumerable turning stars, limitlessly losing and consuming themselves, I can only perceive a succession of cruel splendors whose very movement requires that I die: this death is only the exploding consumption of all that was, the joy of existence of all that comes into the world; even my own life demands that everything that exists, every-where, ceaselessly give itself and be annihilated.*

*I imagine myself covered with blood, broken but transfigured and in agreement with the world, both as prey and as a jaw of TIME, which ceaselessly kills and is ceaselessly killed. There are explosives everywhere that perhaps will soon blind me. I laugh when I think that my eyes persist in demanding objects that do not destroy them.*

## **One's Life on the Line** // Alfredo Bonanno

**Since the beginning of time** man has had a taste for risk and adventure and distorted forms of play such as duels and hunting. Games that put the player's life on the line also date back to ancient times. But to avoid going too far back in history, it is enough to think of Russian roulette, which everyone remembers from the pages of a great Russian novel, or from scenes in a fairly recent American film. In the Fifties a film about violence in rural America depicted a game called the 'rabbit jump', a race between youths, each at the wheel of a car heading towards a cliff edge. The one who jumped out last was the winner. In recent months there have been reports in the news of a 'motorway roulette', which consists of driving along a stretch of motorway the wrong way; whoever gets furthest wins. Another game in fashion with Israeli boys, some under ten, consists of placing a school bag in the middle of the road and snatching it back when a car approaches. The one who retrieves his last wins. According to news reports a number of children have died playing this game.

### **So why put one's life on the line?**

**The answer might simply be** that it is due to the 'crisis in values' of an advanced post-industrial society which has no future to offer young people. Another recent American film showing gang warfare in Los Angeles ended up with a youth who, rather than let himself be arrested, shot a policeman shouting 'There's no future!' And that might be a good answer. The everyday experiences that form the personality have been seriously affected by the profound changes that have taken place in the social

and economic structures of advanced industrialised countries over recent years. The thoughts, emotions and actions of individuals are immersed in a situation that has no pre-existing categories to put them in any kind of order and give them any sense of security.

**This is leading the younger strata**, those not able to cope with such a situation or who are not yet in possession of well-rooted interests and ideas, to feel 'value-deprived' and unable to 'give any meaning to life'.

**Why is this too simple an answer?** First, because it does not seem right to me to relegate everything to an underlying social mechanism that explains everything. Behind this mental attitude lurks a kind of neo-determinism that prevents us from grasping the real motivations at the root of things which, if brought out into the open might give us a better indication of what to do.

**The social disintegration** resulting from economic restructuring in the Eighties is certainly one of the reasons for this chipping away at the values that emerged in the post-war period and remained more or less intact until the end of the Seventies. An institution such as the family, which is turning out to be less and less solid or capable of resolving the important task assigned to it by the bourgeois capitalist society of the last century, is being hit not only by the changing conditions of the world of work and production, but also by the circulation of different ideas, culture, concepts of time and space, and so on. Each of these elements, which it would be simplistic to group together under the term economy, has produced conditions that need to be examined individually. They are of great importance and

make up the connective tissue onto which emotions are grafted the thoughts and actions of so many of the young people who come face to face in today's football stadia and play with their lives in a thousand ways finding themselves as they do with no future, certainties or hope.

**Here we are not simply looking** at the marginal phenomenon of the late integration of young people into the conditions imposed by social life. This has always existed, What we can see now is a phenomenon of a consistency and extension unknown in the past. And if we want to understand it we must also look at our own thinking patterns. We once thought, and rightly so, that working conditions were central to comprehending the reasons as to why the proletariat engaged in the class struggle, including the revolutionary perspective. But objective conditions are changing. We used to think that the struggles of the working class could at any moment transform themselves into revolutionary consciousness, precisely due to the defects in the system of production as a whole. We can no longer think in such an automatic way.

**We used to say** that one thing that put a brake on the class struggle was the educational integration of young people through the family, the foundation stone of the uniformity of judgement that was completed at school, in the army and at work. Many of these things have now changed. Various concepts have entered the family since its disintegration set in, leading it to breathe an air of paternalism, when not downright puerocracy. Information reaches households directly through television, so the censoring filter of parents no longer functions. The latter have also lost some of the authority that once came from simple physical



strength, as there are stricter controls by the State concerning violence towards the underaged. The old affection, the stuff of seventeenth century oil paintings upon which the family was supposed to be based — for the most part a fantasy of writers and poets — is no longer able to cover up the real lack of feeling that exists within this institution. And we anarchists were among the first to put forward a serious critique of the family as the origin of many of the horrors of the class society.

**The same goes for school,** where, with far-sighted clarity, we saw its limitations and defects in the nineteenth century, proposing a libertarian form of education that has now been taken over by the intellectuals of the regime. I don't know if we are capable of understanding what is really happening in school today, but it does not seem to me to be a sector in which we are any further behind than others. The level of anarchist analysis today does not seem to be up to comprehending the rapid changes that are taking place in society and the economy. This is demonstrated by what is being said about the problem of production, and, with a constancy worthy of greater things, the insistence on the validity of more or less revolutionary syndicalism.

**In our opinion,** new problems are presenting themselves on the social scene that cannot be faced by using old analyses, even though they might have been correct at one time. In a way, we have not been able to take what we ourselves formulated to its logical conclusion. The example of the family is significant. We were among the first to denounce the repressive functions of this institution but are nowhere near first, today, in drawing the relevant conclusions.

**The general loss** of traditional values does not see us capable of proposing, I would not say substitutes for, but even critiques of other people's proposals. In the face of the many young people who are asking for a good reason not to put their lives on the line, we do not know what to say. Others have given what we know are not real answers, but the young take them to be such, extinguishing their liberatory aggressiveness and reducing themselves to passive instruments in the hands of power. Others tell them life has a value in itself, because God gave it to us, because it serves pleasure, the Revolution, the continuation of the species, and so on. We know that, taken individually, these statements are not right, but we do a what to propose as a valid alternative to the game of risk for its own sake.

## Paradoxes of Sovereignty // Tiqqun

*“I am NOTHING”: this parody of an affirmation is the final word of sovereign subjectivity, liberated from the influence that it would like to — or that it must — have on things... Because I know that I am, at bottom, this subjective, content-free existence.*

*Georges Bataille*

**In the Spectacle**, power is everywhere; that is, all relations are in the final analysis relations of domination. And because of this no one is sovereign in the Spectacle. It is an objective world where everyone must first subjugate themselves in order to subjugate others in turn.

**To live in conformance** with man’s fundamental aspiration to sovereignty is impossible in the Spectacle except in one single instant: the instant of the act.

**He who isn’t just playing around with life has a need for acts**, for gestures, so that his life can become more real to him than a simple game which can be oriented in any given direction. In the world of the commodity, which is the world of generalized reversibility, where all things merge and transform into one another, where everything is merely ambiguous, transitional, ephemeral, and blended together, only acts cut through it all. In the splendor of their necessary brutality, they carve an unsolvable “after” into what had been “before,” which PEOPLE will regretfully have to recognize as definitive.

**A gesture/an act is an event.** It cuts open a wound in the chaos of the world, and installs at the bottom

of that wound its shards of unambiguity/univocity. It is a matter of establishing so profoundly in their difference things that have been judged as different that what separated them out from each other can never have any possibility of being erased. If there's anything in Bloom that thwarts domination, it is the fact that even dispossessed of everything, even in all his nudity, man still has an uncontrollable metaphysical power of repudiation: the power to kill others and to kill himself. Death, every time it intervenes, rips a disgraceful hole in the biopolitical tissue. Total nihilism/nihilism fulfilled, which has really fulfilled nothing but the dissolution of all otherness in a limitless circulatory immanence, always meets its defeat right there: upon contact with death, life suddenly ceases to be taken for granted. The duty to make decisions which sanctions all properly human existence has always been in part tied to the approach to that abyss.

**On the eve of the day in March 1998** when he massacred four Bloom-students and a Bloom-professor, little Mitchell Johnson declared to his incredulous schoolmates: "Tomorrow I will decide who will live and who will die." This is as far from the Erostratus-ism of Pierre Riviere as it is from fascist hysteria. Nothing is more striking in the reports on the carnage brought about by Kipland Kinkel or Alain Oreiller than their state of cold self-control and total vertical detachment relative to the world. "I'm no longer acting out of sentiment," said Alain Oreiller while executing his mother. There's something calmly suicidal in the affirmation of so omnilateral a non-participation, indifference, and refusal to suffer.

**Often the Spectacle** uses this as a pretext to start talking about "gratuitous" acts — a generic qualifier

with which it hides the purposes it doesn't want to understand, all the while making use of them as a fantastic opportunity to reinject some life into one or the other of bourgeois utilitarianism's favorite false paradoxes — as long as those acts aren't lacking in hatred or reason. To prove this all one needs to do is watch the five video tapes that the "monsters of Littleton" filmed in anticipation of their operation. Their program appears in them quite clearly: "We're going to set off a revolution, a revolution of the dispossessed."

**Here hatred itself is undifferentiated**, free of all personality. Death enters into the universal in the same way as it emerges from the universal, and it has no anger about it.

**This isn't about giving some revolutionary significance to such acts**, and it's hardly even about treating them as exemplary. It's about understanding what they express the doom of, and grasping onto them in order to plumb the depths of Bloom. And whoever follows this path to the end will see that Bloom is NOTHING, but that this NOTHING is a nothing that is sovereign, an emptiness with a pure potential.

**The contradiction** between Bloom's isolation, apathy, powerlessness, and insensitivity on the one hand and on the other his dry and brutal need for sovereignty can only bring about more of these acts, absurd and murderous as they may be, yet still necessary and true. It's all about knowing how to deal with them in the right terms in the future: like [in Mallarmé's] *Igitur*, for instance: "One of the acts of the universe has been committed there. Nothing else but the breath remained, the end of speech and gesture united — blow out the candle of being, by which everything has existed. Proof.

## **Class Hatred** // Monsieur Dupont

**Death appears as the harsh victory** of the law of our ancestors over the dimension of our becoming. It is a fact that, as productivity increases, each succeeding generation becomes smaller. The defeat of our fathers is revisited upon us as the limits of our world. Yes, structure is human, it is the monumentalisation of congealed sweat, sweat squeezed from old exploitation and represented as nature, the world we inhabit, the objective ground. We do not, in our busy insect-like comings and goings, make the immediate world in which we live, we do not make a contribution, on the contrary we are set in motion by it; a generation will pass before what we have done as an exploited class will seep through as an effect of objectivity. (Our wealth is laid down in heaven.) The structure of the world was built by the dead, they were paid in wages, and when the wages were spent and they were dead in the ground, what they had made continued to exist, these cities, roads and factories are their calcified bones.

**They had nothing** but their wages to show for what they had done and after their deaths what they did and who they were has been cancelled out. But what they made has continued into our present, their burial and decay is our present.

**This is the definition of class hatred.** We are no closer now to rest, to freedom, to communism than they were, their sacrifice has bought us nothing, what they did counted for nothing, we have inherited nothing, we work as they worked, we make as they made, we are paid as they were paid. We do not possess either our acts or the world that conditions us, just as they owned nothing of their lives.

**Yes they produced value,** they made the world in which we now live. The world that now weighs down upon us is constructed from the wealth they made, wealth that was taken from them as soon as they were paid their wage, taken and owned by someone else, owned and used to define the nature of ownership and the class domination that preserves it.

**We too must work,** and the value we produce leaks away from us, from each only a trickle but in all a sea of it and that, for the next generation, will thicken into wealth for others to own and as a congealed structure it will be used as a vantage point for the bourgeoisie to direct new enterprises in new and different directions but demanding always the same work.

**The class war begins** in the desecration of our ancestors: millions of people going to their graves as failures, forever denied the experience of a full human existence, their being was simply cancelled out. The violence of the bourgeoisie's appropriation of the world of work becomes the structure that dominates our existence. As our parents die, we can say truly that their lives were for nothing, that the black earth that is thrown down onto them blacks out our sky.

**Kant Defines the schema of possibility** as "the determination of the representation of a thing in whatever time." It seems that the form of the whatever, an irreducible quodlibet-like character, inheres in potentiality and possibility, insofar as they are distinct from reality. But what potentiality are we dealing with here? And what does "whatever" mean in this context?

**Of the two modes** in which, according to Aristotle, every potentiality is articulated, the decisive one is that which the philosopher calls "the potentiality to not-be" (*dynamis me einai*) or also impotence (*adynamia*). For if it is true that whatever being always has a potential character, it is equally certain that it is not capable of only this or that specific act, nor is it therefore simply incapable, lacking in power, nor even less is it indifferently capable of everything, all-powerful: The being that is properly whatever is able to not-be; it is capable of its own impotence.

**Everything rests here** on the mode in which the passage from potentiality to act comes about. The symmetry between the potentiality to be and the potentiality to not-be is, in effect, only apparent. In the potentiality to be, potentiality has as its object a certain act, in the sense that for it *energein*, being-in-act, can only mean passing to a determinate activity (this is why Schelling defines the potentiality that cannot not pass into action as blind); as for the potentiality to not-be, on the other hand, the act can never consist of a simple transition *de potentia ad actum*: It is, in other words, a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, a *potentia potentiae*.



**Only a power that is capable of both power and impotence**, then, is the supreme power. If every power is equally the power to be and the power to not-be, the passage to action can only come about by transporting (Aristotle says "saving") in the act its own power to not-be. This means that, even though every pianist necessarily has the potential to play and the potential to not-play, Glenn Gould is, however, the only one who can not not-play, and, directing his potentiality not only to the act but to his own impotence, he plays, so to speak, with his potential to not-play. While his ability simply negates and abandons his potential to not-play, his mastery conserves and exercises in the act not his potential to play (this is the position of irony that affirms the superiority of the positive potentiality over the act), but rather his potential to not-play.

**In De anima** Aristotle articulates this theory in absolute terms with respect to the supreme theme of metaphysics. If thought were in fact only the potentiality to think this or that intelligibility, he argues, it would always already have passed through to the act and it would remain necessarily inferior to its own object. But thought, in its essence, is pure potentiality; in other words, it is also the potentiality to not think, and, as such, as possible or material intellect, Aristotle compares it to a writing tablet on which nothing is written. (This is the celebrated image that the Latin translators render with the expression *tabula rasa*, even if, as the ancient commentators noted, one should speak rather of a *rasum tabulae*, that is, of the layer of wax covering the tablet that the stylus engraves.)

**Thanks to this potentiality to not-think**, thought can turn back to itself (to its pure potentiality) and be, at

its apex, the thought of thought. What it thinks here, however, is not an object, a being-in-act, but that layer of wax, that *rasum tabulae* that is nothing but its own passivity, its own pure potentiality (to not-think): In the potentiality that thinks itself, action and passion coincide and the writing tablet writes by itself or, rather, writes its own passivity.

**The perfect act of writing comes not from a power to write,** but from an impotence that turns back on itself and in this way comes to itself as a pure act (which Aristotle calls agent intellect). This is why in the Arab tradition agent intellect has the form of an angel whose name is Qalam, Pen, and its place is an unfathomable potentiality. Bartleby, a scribe who does not simply cease writing but "prefers not to," is the extreme image of this angel that writes nothing but its potentiality to not-write.

## The Simplest of Pleasures // Michel Foucault

**'Homosexuals often commit suicide,'** reports a psychiatric study. This word 'often' fascinates me. We might imagine tall, slender, pallid creatures unable to cross over the threshold to the opposite sex, in a face-off with death all through life, only to end it finally by slamming the door with a loud bang (which never fails to annoy the neighbours). Instead of marrying the opposite sex they marry death. The other sex is replaced by the other side. But, the story goes, they're just as incapable of dying as they are of really living. In this ludicrous account suicide and homosexuals are portrayed so as to make each other look bad. So let's see what there is to say in favour of suicide. Not so much in support of legalizing it or making it 'moral'. Too many people have already belaboured these lofty things. Instead, let's say something against the shady affairs, humiliations, and hypocrisies that its detractors usually surround it with: hastily getting boxes of pills together, finding a solid, old-fashioned razor, or licking gun store windows and entering some place pretending to be on the verge of death. In my opinion a person should have the right not to be rushed, which is very bothersome.

**Indeed,** a great deal of attention and competence are required. You should have the chance to discuss at length the various qualities of each weapon and its potential. It would be nice if the salesperson were experienced in these things, with a big smile, encouraging but a little bit reserved (not too chatty), and sophisticated enough to understand that they are dealing with a person who's basically good-hearted, but somewhat clumsy, never having had the idea before of employing a machine that shoots people.

It would also be convenient if the salesperson's enthusiasm didn't stop them from advising you about the existence of alternative ways, ways that were more chic, more your style. This kind of business-like discussion is worth a thousand times more than the chatter that goes on around the corpse among the employees of the funeral parlour. Some people that we didn't even know, and who didn't know us either, arranged it so that one day we started existing. They pretended to believe, no doubt sincerely, that they were waiting for us. In any case they prepared for our entry into the world with great care (and often with a sort of second-hand seriousness). It's quite inconceivable that we not be given the chance to prepare ourselves with all the passion, intensity and detail that we wish, including the little extras that we've been dreaming about for such a long time, since childhood perhaps or just some warm summer evening.

**Life it seems is quite fragile in the human species and death quite certain.** Why must we make of this certainty a mere happenstance (which might suggest, by virtue of its suddenness or inevitability, or air of punishment)? The philosophies that promise to teach us what to think about death and how to die bore me to tears. I'm not at all moved by those things that are supposed to 'prepare us for it.' One has to prepare it bit by bit, decorate it, arrange the details, find the ingredients, imagine it, choose it, get advice on it, shave it into a work without spectators, one which exists only for oneself, just for that shortest little moment of life. Those who survive, of course, see suicide as nothing but superficial traces, solitude, awkwardness, and unanswered cries. These people can't help but ask 'why?': the only question about death that shouldn't be asked.

**'Why? Because I wanted to.'** It's true that suicide often leaves discouraging traces. But who's to blame? Do you think it's pleasant to have to hang yourself in the kitchen with your tongue hanging out all bluish? Or to close yourself in the garage and turn on the gas? Or to leave a tiny bit of your brain lying on the sidewalk for the dogs to come and sniff at? I believe that we're witnessing in these times a 'suicidal spiral' because many people are so depressed at the thought of all these nasty things that are forced on someone who's aspiring to suicide (things including the police, the ambulance, the elevator man, the autopsy and what not), that many prefer to commit suicide rather than to continue to think about it all. Some advice to lovers of humanity: If you really want to see a decrease in the number of suicides, support only those potential suicides which are committed with forethought, quietly and without wavering.

**Suicide** must not be left to unhappy people who might bungle it or make a mess of it. In any case there are lots fewer happy than unhappy people. It's always struck me as strange that people say that death is nothing to worry about, because between life and nothingness death is nothing but a border. But it is true that this is all there is to the game? Make something of it, something fine. No doubt we've missed out on a lot of pleasures and we've had some that were pretty mediocre: others we've let slip by out of laziness or lack of attention, imagination or persistence. We should consider ourselves lucky to have at hand (with suicide) an extremely unique experience: it's the one which above all the rest deserves the greatest attention - but rather so that you can make of it a fathomless pleasure whose patient and relentless preparation will enlighten all of your life. Suicide festivals or orgies are just two of

the possible methods. There are others more intricate and learned.

**When I see the funeral 'homes'** in American cities I'm not just appalled by how dreadfully banal they are, as if death had to smother any attempt at imagination, but also I think it's a pity that they serve cadavers and their glad-to-still-be-alive families. Let there be some alternatives for those of little means and those who have grown weary of too much reflection so that they don't have to rely on these pre-packaged, boring and expensive expedients. For example, alternatives like those the Japanese have devised (they're called 'love hotels') for having sex. They know a lot more about suicide than we do. If you have the chance to go to the Chantilly in Tokyo you'll see what I mean. You'll sense there the existence of places without maps or calendars where you can enter into the most absurd decors with anonymous partners to look for an opportunity to die free of all stereotypes. There you'd have an indeterminate amount of time - seconds, weeks, and months perhaps - until the moment presents itself with compelling clearness. You'd recognize it immediately. You couldn't miss it. It would have the shapeless shape of utterly simple pleasure.

## **Eternity Through the Stars** // Louis Auguste Blanqui

**The entire universe** is composed of stellar systems. In order to create them nature has only one hundred simple bodies at its disposal. Despite the prodigious profit it knows how to make from its resources, and the incalculable number of combinations these allow its fecundity, the result is necessarily a finite number, like that of the elements themselves. And in order to fill the entire expanse nature must infinitely repeat each of its original or generic combinations.

**Every star**, whatever it might be, thus exists in infinite number in time and space, not only in one of its aspects, but as it is found in every second of its duration, from birth until death. All the beings spread across its surface, big or little, animate or inanimate, share in this privilege of perennity.

**The earth is one of these stars.** Every human being is thus eternal in every second of its existence. What I write now in a cell in the fort of Taureau I wrote and will write under the same circumstances for all of eternity, on a table, with a pen, wearing clothing. And so for all.

**One after another** all these earths are submerged in renovatory flames, to be re-born there and to fall into them again, the monotonous flowing of an hourglass that eternally turns and empties itself. It is something new that is always old; something old that is always new.

**Those curious** about extra-terrestrial life will nevertheless smile at a mathematical conclusion that grants them not only immortality but eternity. The

number of our doubles is infinite in time and space. In all conscience, we can hardly ask for more. These doubles are of flesh and blood, or in pants and coats, in crinoline and chignon. These aren't phantoms: they are the now eternalized.

**There is nevertheless a great defect:** there is, alas, no progress! No, these are vulgar re-editions, repetitions. As it is with editions of past worlds, so it is with those of future worlds. Only the chapter of bifurcations remains open to hope. Never forget that all we could have been here, we are somewhere else.

**Progress here is only for our nephews.** They are luckier than us. All the beautiful things that our globe will see our future descendants have already seen, see now, and will always see in the form of doubles who preceded them and who follow them. Children of a better humanity, they have already scoffed at us and mocked us on dead earths, passing there after us. From living earths from which we have disappeared they continue to condemn us; and on earths to be born, they will forever pursue us with their contempt.

**Them and us,** as well as all the guests of our planet, are born over again as prisoners of the moment and place that destiny assigns us in its series of avatars. Our perennity is an appendix of its perennity. We are but partial phenomena of its resurrections. Men of the 19th Century, the hour of our apparition is forever fixed, and we are returned always the same, at best with the possibility of happy variants. There is nothing much there to satisfy the thirst for what is better. What then is to be done? I haven't sought my happiness; I have sought after truth. You will find



here neither a revelation nor a prophet, but a simple deduction from the spectral analysis and cosmogony of Laplace. These two discoveries make us eternal. Is this a godsend? We should profit from it. Is it a mystification? We should resign ourselves to it.

**But isn't it a consolation** to know ourselves to constantly be, on millions of planets, in the company of our beloved, who is today naught but a memory? Is it another, on the other hand, to think that we have tasted and will eternally taste this happiness in the shape of a double, of millions of doubles! Yet this is what we are. For many of the small minded this happiness through substitutes is somewhat lacking in rapture. They would prefer three or four supplementary years of the current edition to all the duplicates of the infinite. In our century of disillusionment and skepticism we are keen at clinging to things.

**But deep down** this eternity of man through the stars is melancholy, and sadder still this sequestration of brother-worlds through the barrier of space. So many identical populations that pass each other without suspecting their mutual existence! But yes! It has finally been discovered at the end of the 19th Century. But who will believe it?

**And in any event,** up till now the past represented barbarism to us, and the future signified progress, science, happiness, illusion! This past has seen brilliant civilizations disappear without leaving a trace on all our double-worlds; and they will disappear without leaving anymore of them. On millions of earths the future will see the ignorance, stupidity, and cruelty of our former ages.

**At the present time** the entire life of our planet, from birth until death, is being detailed day by day with all its crimes and misfortunes on a myriad of brother-stars. What we call progress is imprisoned on every earth, and fades away with it. Always and everywhere in the terrestrial field the same drama, the same décor; on the same limited stage a boisterous humanity, infatuated with its greatness, believing itself to be the universe, and living in its prison as if it were immense spaces, only to soon fall along with the globe that carried — with the greatest disdain — the burden of its pride. The same monotony, the same immobility on foreign stars. The universe repeats itself endlessly and fidgets in place. Eternity infinitely and imperturbably acts out the same performance.

## **To the Aspiring Suicides...**

**We talk about suicide a lot these days,** because times are hard... Capitalism's restructuring, mass lay-offs, the expatriation of industry, the rising cost of consumer goods, social services becoming more and more exclusive, etc. ... One could believe that it's the fall of capitalism, but capital only shores up its foundations a little bit more with the wave of suicides among employees of France Telecom, Peugeot, Renault, the increase of occupational illnesses, the consumption of anti-depressants and psychotropics to make the pill of exploitation go down a little easier. One even hears now and again that there are workers revolting in the four corners of the world, that often they are too isolated to bring their struggle through to completion, that they are sometimes crushed in a sea of blood. If many are stubborn and don't give it up, many others resign themselves, and sometimes, suicidal, they make the ultimate choice.

**If we address these words to you,** men and women who are disgusted with everything and who will not be turned by back by anything or anyone from a tragic fate, it is not to remind you of a nonexistent duty to look highly upon a life which is not worth the trouble of living. We will not disrespect your decision, for you and you alone are capable of knowing the extent of the pain and the anguish which poisons your existence. Whoever doesn't feel that pain, that anguish, who has never even been touched by these things, because they are warped by money or blinded by faith, has no right to fault your fatal determination.

**So we don't want to preach to you,** nor to prevent

you from realising your firm decision. We simply have the intention of asking a favour of you, a little favour from those of you who have decided to quit this world, but one which would give immense joy to we who, for the moment, have decided to stay. Since you have resolved to undertake the Great Voyage, while you are on your way, could you not focus your gaze on some of those adversities which have rendered your days on this earth so unbearable?

**To want to take the final step** in solitude is understandable, it's human. But to do it with company is sublime, divine. What's more, what do you have to fear? For once nothing will come to bother you, reproach you for the consequences of your gesture. For example, you could swallow your poison only after having fed it to the deputy<sup>1</sup> who had been making you drink it for years. You want to put lead in your brain? Okay, but not before having shot it into that of the bank director who ruined you. If you would rather pull the noose around your throat, why not, beforehand, practise on the throat of the baron of industry who fired you? Before going beyond you could surprise the bishop who excommunicated your conscience, by setting him up with an immediate meeting with his Supreme Master. And why not take the cop who's waiting beside you for the train or the subway with you beneath the wheels? It would finally kick his bad habit of imprisoning the freedom of others. Don't be offended, but we have never understood why the courthouse or the stock exchange doesn't excite the imagination of despairing people such as yourself, as schools seem to in the US – a hail of bullets against the judges, the financial speculators, would be a touching parting gift to your companions in misfortune.

**Can you imagine** what would happen if even a fifth of the uncompromising suicides of each country associated their last breath with that of an infamous, powerful man? For your merit – you, the habitually blamed suicides – we would see a rise in moral awareness; in the highest circles, they would think twice before casting other human beings into the despair which is yours.

**Maybe** we will find the strength to finish the work that you would have generously started.

**We entreat you,** we beg you, please, great disheartened ones of the five continents, have heart one last time. Do not die alone and ignored,

**Choose** an institutional celebrity and kick the bucket in tandem.

**Rather than throwing this zine in the street,**  
smother a guard with it

## **Materialism of Joy**

Georges Bataille | **Joy before Death**

Alfredo Bonanno | **One's Life on the Line**

Tiqqun | **Paradoxes of Sovereignty**

Monsieur Dupont | **Class Hatred**

Georgio Agamben | **Bartleby**

Michel Foucault | **The Simplest of Pleasures**

Louis Blanqui | **Eternity Through the Stars**

**To the Aspiring Suicides...**

*abolish*  
*suic*